

# Is Bonang’s Revlon deal a game-changer?

## Are local celebs really making money from product endorsements? A brand expert says it is not so simple

MUNYARADZI VOMO

**‘W**HEN I was a little girl I used to see and be inspired by the beautiful face of a woman on the packaging of a Revlon product. I never knew that one day that woman would be me and there would be young girls out there looking at my image on the new Revlon packaging, hopefully getting inspired to dream big.”

Those are the words of TV personality Bonang Matheba who recently signed a lucrative deal with Revlon, becoming the face of the international product.

Being the first South African to have this opportunity puts her in the same bracket as international superstars Halle Berry, Emma Stone and Cindy Crawford.

According to brand and reputation authority Thebe Ikalafeng, Matheba’s affiliation with the brand has already begun bearing fruit.

“I was on Twitter right after Bonang signed with Revlon and saw several young women were thanking her as they were happy with the results after using the product,” he says. “That is great news for Revlon, assuming the women are their target market.”

Ikalafeng feels the culture and business of endorsements, just like that of celebrities, is still in its infancy in South Africa and on the rest of the continent. But those individuals who are fortunate enough to spark the interest of big companies are beginning to reap great rewards.

“I am sure that people like Gareth Cliff, DJ Fresh, Trevor Noah and Bonang are earning an enviable income because they have broad appeal and corporates want to be associated with them. Just as an estimate, I think the Revlon deal could pay something not less than half a million rand a year. When Noah signed up with Cell C a couple of years ago, it was rumoured that he was paid about R3 million,” he speculates.

Although our entertainment industry is minuscule compared to that of the US or the UK, Ikalafeng thinks that there is growth and in time local brand ambassadors will net even greater deals.

“If you look at George Clooney and his deal with Nespresso you see how lucrative endorsement deals can be. Because they could not afford his fees, instead, they gave him shares in the business, which has added to his enormous wealth. Similarly, 50 Cent earned a reputed \$400m (R3.8 billion) when he sold his shares in Galaceau’s Vitamin Water when Coca-Cola bought the business. But we are not there yet,” says Ikalafeng.

While our industry may be small on an international scale, companies still have a wide pool of choices from which to select who they wish to represent their brands. This is why several people, like Connie Fergusson (Lewis, Gaviscon), HHP (Vodacom), Gail Mabalane (Olay) and Minnie Dlamini (Jeep, Motions) represent different companies.

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### THE ENDORSEMENT LANDSCAPE IN SA IS LUCRATIVE TO ONLY A SELECT FEW

However, celebrity endorsement is not a science. It’s a business decision. A relationship based on the ability of the celebrity to deliver on the promise consistently over time, adds Ikalafeng.

“When deciding on a face or name for a brand, a company looks at several strategic questions: Who are the celebrities? Is there an alignment to what they and their brand stand for? Do they have an audience? Do they have a platform to engage; a medium? Is there an alignment between that audience and their target market? Everything is carefully assessed before a company signs an ambassador as they want the most out of the deal,” says Ikalafeng.

Explaining why she attracts the several brands she represents, TV personality Minnie Dlamini felt it

had to do with her personality.

“I guess it’s because I am young and fresh yet I am able to appeal to a wide audience,” says Dlamini.

According to Ikalafeng, in almost every case, most endorsement deals are signed with individuals who are “at the top of their game, with a desirable and sustainable appeal”.

It is this success, according to Ikalafeng, that the corporate world aims to associate with. However as with any contract, endorsements come with terms and conditions.

“When a company signs a celebrity, there are mutual benefits as there are also mutual obligations. Both parties need to stick to their ends of the bargain. For example, the people who bought into the Nonhle Thema brand did not foresee her Twitter meltdown and its repercussions on their brand. It may explain why things turned out the way they did with respect to her loss of sponsorship and even more importantly, a media platform,” he says.

“Celebrities need to prove that they are desirable, consistent and profitable. A brand is a promise made and a promise delivered, over time. Therefore they must demonstrate they can sustain their brand,” he adds.

Although the culture of endorsements is still starting up in Africa, Ikalafeng feels it’s steadily improving to possibly match international standards. However, for corporates, it’s important to note that celebrities are human with frailties and faults. Therefore they at all times must balance and mitigate risks. Oscar Pistorius and Lance Armstrong are good cases in point.

While another brand specialist – who preferred to remain anonymous because he works with top local celebrities – agrees with Ikalafeng, he warns: “I don’t think we are getting a fair deal from companies. I just think our talent is not treated like that of our international counterparts.

“When our artists go overseas they don’t get to make demands the way international artists do. They are not even allowed to. So with that mindset companies tend to then come with sets of conditions and our celebrities are happy to oblige because they don’t know any better.”

The brand guru said this trend



**DREAM COME TRUE:** Bonang Matheba is the new face of Revlon. She hopes her face on the packaging will inspire young girls to dream big.

is as a result of the fact Africa is generally looked down upon. “If you demand money they will go to the next celebrity who will most probably be happy to just be an unpaid ambassador. I have had some companies approach our talent and pitch deals where the artist endorses a product and in return they get nothing but supplies of the product. We simply turn down such insulting pitches,” he says.

He adds that sometimes when it comes to companies paying, they generally offer non-negotiable figures, which are usually minuscule compared to what the international world rates are and what these companies make in return out of these deals.

“We had a situation once where a cosmetics company offered us a few hundred thousand rand for

endorsing their new product. When we had a meeting with our artist and agreed that this was a low fee, the company made the same offer to the next artist who took it,” he said.

This information almost solves the mystery of why local celebrities live luxurious lives and yet die poor. The bulk of them wouldn’t have made the money we mistakenly assume they have.

“The problem starts with us artist or celeb minders. We work hard to create illusions about these personalities and the media bites into it. The celebrities then have to look for ways to keep up appearances and that’s why they end up in debt,” he explains.

To encapsulate it all, the endorsement landscape in South Africa is profitable only to a select

few. High-profile people like Matheba have the capacity to sit at a table and negotiate terms with big companies. The rest have to make do with what comes their way, since endorsements are not in abundance.

“So far the people who really make money are those in the sports industry. If you look at Oscar Pistorius and Ryk Neethling, their endorsement deals paid multi-millions.

“The entertainment industry, on the other hand, is just fluff. Most entertainers aren’t paid their worth and sadly they lie about what they get, which lets the companies off scot-free,” warns the brand specialist.

Could Matheba’s Revlon deal be a game-changer? That remains to be seen.

## Tyson back on pay TV with verbal punches

MIKE Tyson is going back to pay TV, where his fights were some of the biggest moneymakers in boxing history.

Only this time the punches he is throwing are verbal.

The former heavyweight champion is teaming with director Spike Lee to bring Tyson’s one-man stage show to HBO later this year.

The programme was filmed on Broadway, where *Mike Tyson: Undisputed Truth* ran last summer.

Lee used 11 cameras to film the show that he described as part of Tyson’s legacy outside the ring.

Tyson gives an unvarnished recounting of his life’s highs and lows, including his years in prison, biting Evander Holyfield’s ear, his marriages, being a tabloid target and his drug use.

“Most human beings are not going to display the dark parts of themselves, the demons they have, to the world,” Lee told the Television Critics Association this week.

“When you see this he’s out there on this stage naked sharing his experience, his ups and downs to the audience and it’s traumatic. It’s the most courageous thing I’ve ever seen in my life. I couldn’t do it and most people couldn’t do it.”

Tyson found walking on stage to do a live show similar to going into the ring, with similar energy among the Broadway and fight crowds.

“I can’t wait to get my hands on the guy like I can’t wait to get on stage. Just like in a fight, I wanted to kill everybody in the room, by my performance, of course,” he said, adding the biggest difference was “I don’t have to go to the hospital after I perform.”

With Tyson waiting in the wings with his microphone clipped on, Lee said: “We had to hold him back until he hears the bell because he’s ready to go.”

Tyson’s wife, Kiki, wrote the script for the stage show, which toured the country earlier this year. Tyson said it reflected his life’s journey from Brooklyn street urchin to happily married father.

“It’s how I plan on living my life now in a productive way,” he said. “This is all pretty much new to me but it’s working.” – Sapa-AP



**Mike Tyson teamed with Spike Lee to bring his one-man stage show to HBO later this year.** PICTURE: AP

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